

Leading in a Skirt: The Gendered Exceptionalism of Jacinda Ardern's Political Leadership

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During the first triennium of Ardern's premiership, Aotearoa New Zealand experienced three different massive crisis events: a terrorist attack, a natural disaster, and a global health pandemic. Ardern's political leadership through these events was celebrated as gendered exceptionalism, and a 'new form' of gendered leadership, with influential US magazine *The New Yorker* (2019) crediting Ardern's leadership response to the terrorist attacks on the Al-Noor Mosque and the Linwood Islamic Centre in Christchurch, New Zealand to "the fact that she is a woman." Women in leadership positions in all sectors of the public sphere are subject to role incongruity. Leadership is seen as a masculinised and agentic function (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Moreover, political leadership is seen as an all-consuming position. There is no real day off for a politician, a sleeping prime minister is still the prime minister. This is akin to the societal understanding that a mother in the workplace does not stop being a mother during her shift (see Fraser, 1995). This also offers a justification for why female fertility and the possibility of motherhood is used to dissuade women from joining the political field and taking on leadership positions in the public sphere (Trimble, 2017), as Western cultural beliefs about mothers are, in fact, embedded into their perception and belief of all women and people assigned female at birth (Ridgeway & Correll, 2004).

Gigliotti (2016) notes that crises are situations where leaders' sensemaking of crises shapes their reputation and legacies in the eyes of their followers. Ardern's crisis leadership has been lauded internationally. She has been celebrated for being passionate, compassionate, and steadfast in the face of crises, with an approach that exhibited feminine leadership behaviours that contrasted her contemporaries, who were older men affiliated with conservative politics that are more congruent to a patriarchal conception of how a leader should look and act (Eagly & Karau, 2002). There have been assertions across academic and media discourses that Ardern was 'a leader who is a paragon of what the age needs, but also a leader out-of-step with the times the world lives in' (Van Wart et al., 2022, p.642).

I will examine how Ardern's sensemaking of the three major crises events: the Christchurch mosque attacks (March 2019), the eruption of Whakaari White Island (December 2019), and the first nine months of the COVID-19 pandemic from March-December 2020, which saw Aotearoa New Zealand take strict lockdown measures to avoid viral spread while awaiting the creation of a vaccine. Aotearoa New Zealand is a mediated democracy. Thus, Ardern's leadership performance and sensemaking are mediated through news stories and media live streams to connect to her followers, the New Zealand public. Drawing on content analysis (Krippendorff, 2019) and thematic analysis (Braun & Clarke, 2021), I will analyse how the news media across 30 news media products across New Zealand, Australia, the United States, the United Kingdom, and Canada represent Ardern's feminised and compassionate leadership style, which arguably led to the subsequent landslide victory of Jacinda Ardern's New Zealand Labour Party at the October 2020 general election (Van Wart et al., 2022).

I argue that Ardern's sensemaking and leadership legacy is refracted through a patriarchal understanding of gender roles and the stereotype of women as maternal, caring nurturers (Jaggar, 1988). Gender is society's key to structuring and interpreting public and private life. Gender also encodes journalistic news values that dictate how the sensemaking of Jacinda Ardern's leadership is mediated to citizens and voters through news media stories (Ross, 2017; Trimble, 2017). Ardern's performance of her gendered leadership during her first term as Prime Minister can be seen as a symbolic step towards smashing the glass ceiling. Her vow to do politics differently saw her celebrated for her protective feminine style of leadership (Johnson & Williams, 2020) that resulted in successful policy change and citizens complying with their role in followership, including lockdown compliance in early 2020 and a gun buy-back scheme as gun control laws changed after the Christchurch mosque attacks. This paper argues that Ardern's legacy will not be one of 'just another prime minister' but instead a legacy of compassion, and a strong valuing of feminine ideals and characteristics in leadership.

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Title: Optimizing crisis management: A case against authentic leadership maximization

Abstract:

As a buoy to the disillusionment that punctuated the ethical social representations of business and c-suite, an abundance of positive scholarship contributions emerged in the last couple of decades. This abundance has produced much research but also many critics. Once a given construct gains enough momentum to be criticized for its conceptual inconsistencies and empirical divergent findings, a novel construct takes its place, albeit it is but old wine in new bottles, as observed in Hirsch and Levin's (1999) umbrella constructs dynamics. The proliferation of constructs is a well-documented phenomenon (Borman & Rowaold, 2018) and it does have its telltale signs. One of those signs is heated debates that may witness strong critical positions with calls for abandoning or implementing a moratorium on research (e.g. as witnessed in the early 1980s with organizational effectiveness versus performance, Cameron, 1981). Positive leadership styles seem to have reached this point (e.g. Fischer & Sitkin, 2023), namely authentic leadership.

Although authenticity has been hailed as a desirable leadership feature characterized by its morally-based nature, where leaders are expected to be self-cognizant, transparent their relationships with others, maintain an internalized moral perspective, and consider all sources of information before making decisions (Walumbwa et al., 2008), this construct has been at the center of an ongoing debate. The heated debate questions its conceptual and theoretical grounds, its measurement, and its effectiveness (e.g. Alvesson & Einola, 2019; 2022; Einola & Alvesson, 2021; Fischer & Sitkin, 2023; Gardner et al., 2021; Gardner & MacCauley, 2022a, 2022b). No calls for moratorium or abandoning were witnessed yet but divergences seem to be in a crescendo and both have their merits.

Divergences invite questioning assumptions. Among these, that leaders may not be authentic but rather their behaviors (Helmuth et al., 2023), also that maximal effectiveness ascribed to authenticity may clash with contextual dependencies, better depicted by a "too-much-of-a-good-thing effect" (TMGT, e.g. Stouten et al., 2013). Additionally, that positive organizational scholarship needs to acknowledge the paradoxical nature of power in leadership (Cunha et al., 2021).

This power dimension of leadership is especially relevant when facing adversity under a high-uncertainty context where crises can threaten the persistence of the organization itself. Crisis readiness is a preventive responsibility of leaders that entail all higher-level capabilities of strategic leadership (e.g. anticipating contextual changes, setting contingency plans, maintaining strategic flexibility, managing critical information) and knowing which image to convey to crisis-makers. It is hardly the case that authentic leadership could offer an effective answer to this preventive responsibility as cunningness seems to be entailed in the political rationale while it is precluded in the authenticity construct. At best,

authentic leadership could have an optimum above which it becomes counter-productive. At worst, it would be a naive exercise that could be cushioned by some political savvy.

With this in mind, this study is designed to test an optimal function between authentic leadership and the ascribed leadership ability to protect from crises, which is expected to depict a TMGT pattern. If indeed the commonly observed assumption that authenticity maximizes leadership effectiveness is true, then no such curvilinear effect should be observed. However, political savvy can moderate any naivete that authenticity may suggest.

With a sample of 286 employees, we tested a moderated model with GLM where political savvy interacts with authentic leadership quadratic relation with crisis readiness. Controlling for age, gender, dyadic tenure, and ethical leadership, findings supported an inverted u-shaped curvilinear relation between authentic leadership and crisis readiness. Moreover, this effect is independent of the level of political savviness ascribed to the leader. Authentic leadership has an optimum, not a maximum.

Findings suggest that the ongoing debate may benefit from considering boundary conditions not only regarding contextual dependencies but also the limitations themselves of authenticity as one pole of the paradoxical nature of leadership.

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Jacinda Ardern and the glass case of sexism and misogyny

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This paper examines gender-based prejudice women leaders may encounter through a case study of the sexism and misogyny directed at Jacinda Ardern, former Prime Minister of New Zealand. We draw on media and social media sources plus extant analysis of trends in the New Zealand social media landscape, developing the concept of an incrementally forged ‘glass cage’ that saw Ardern’s ability to lead progressively constrained over her tenure, due to the increasingly hostile and violent expressions of sexism and misogyny directed at her. We suggest other cases of this phenomenon, thereby challenging and extending existing attempts to theorize the barriers faced by women in leadership.

There is a vast literature showing gender-based prejudice against women’s leadership has long been a significant and pervasive problem (e.g. Elliot & Stead, 2009; Storberg-Walker & Haber-Curran, 2017). Globally, at the beginning of 2023 women made up just 26.5% of parliamentarians while only 16% of the world’s countries had a woman as Head of State and/or Government (UN Women, 2023). Parliamentary politics, local politics and even political life at large were designed by men for men: women’s presence in politics remains a key site of challenge to patriarchal power.

Patriarchal norms drive the sexist expectation that, regardless of their gender, effective politicians ought to display conventionally masculine attitudes and behaviours (Stevens, 2007). Women politicians often disguise or minimise their femininity to conform better and survive in the masculinized environment of politics (Elgie, 2017; Foley, 2013), reinforcing what role incongruity theory argues: the leadership role is prototypically masculinized, meaning women face the dilemma of navigating between the conflicting expectations of leadership and womanhood (Eagly & Karau, 2002). Women (and gender-diverse people) have to convince the traditional polity that they are competent politicians *despite* their gender, not *because of it* (Ross, 2002).

Jacinda Ardern, however, sought to transcend these constraints, advocating conventionally feminine and feminist values, such as kindness and compassion, as constituting sources of strength. She demonstrated, also, a feminised approach to the agentic, ‘masculine’ qualities expected of leaders – confidence, assertiveness and resilience under pressure (Ardern, 2023; Eagly & Karau, 2022). She was a woman leader who dared to challenge convention and make bold decisions – actions inevitably bound to attract controversy and critique. It is the profoundly gendered character of much of that critique that concerns us.

Our analysis is split into two periods, firstly analysing sexist discourses and rhetoric present in New Zealand media from late 2017 through to August 2021. The second spans the period from August 2021 until Ardern’s resignation in January 2023, during which an increasingly violent misogyny became far more prominent in critical commentary about Ardern.

Pre-August 2021, Ardern led New Zealand through the aftermath of a terrorist attack, a natural disaster, and the beginning of a pandemic outbreak, attracting global praise for her caring and decisive responses to each (Simpson, et al, 2021; Wilson, 2020. Van Wart et al, 2022). She was the second elected leader to give birth in office and the first to take maternity leave and be re-elected. Key themes in this period include: sexist-infused scorning and belittlement of her authority, legitimacy and competence; praise laced with benevolent misogyny, through crediting her success to her gender rather than her leadership abilities; and, sexist narratives of Ardern’s subversion of gendered parenting roles. These sexist efforts to undermine Ardern's credibility laid the groundwork for the subsequent emergence of more overtly misogynistic critique.

Post August 2021, fuelled by conspiratorial and disinformation narratives and resistance to COVID-19 policies, increasingly hostile and violent expressions of sexism and misogyny, both online and offline, came to undermine Ardern's legitimacy and ability to lead. Key themes during this period include: narrative and imagery that abused and dehumanized Ardern; narrative and imagery that fantasized or threatened her rape, murder and/or ritualized humiliation or torture; coordinated efforts to render unsafe or impractical her ability to meet and engage with the public; and, the increasing normalisation of expressions of complete contempt and hatred for Ardern even amongst critics not directly engaged in the use of extreme narrative and imagery.

Arising from Ardern's case, our concept of an incrementally forged 'glass cage' seeks to characterise situations in which a woman leader is intensively scrutinized, has her legitimacy undermined, and her capacity to act increasingly constrained over time by sexist and misogynistic hostility. Key processes involved in its construction include the normalization of sexist evaluations of her leadership and misogynistic abuse; the progressive undermining of a leader's legitimacy and authority; the use of 'witch hunting' tactics designed to pressure her withdrawal from office; and, a pervasive reliance on the 'logic of rape' to purport that she deserves such hateful, persecutory treatment. These practices create a hostile and unsafe environment that not only impedes a woman leader's ability to act but, simultaneously, deters other women from engaging in politics and in leadership. We posit such dynamics are not unique to Ardern, offering other examples to further illustrate the value of this concept to our understanding of the barriers to women's leadership.

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Social Responsibility DNA: Leadership Approach in Ukrainian Tech Companies Building Resilience

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In times of crisis, organizations face unprecedented challenges which demand innovative approaches to maintain sustainability and adaptability to build resilience. Using the revelatory case of Ukrainian high-tech companies striving in times of war, this research explores the role of leadership and social responsibility in building adaptability and strength in times of crisis with the following research question:

RQ: How has social responsibility helped Ukrainian tech leaders to build resilience during the war?

Methods

This study uses a qualitative research methodology based on semi-structured interviews with leaders from a diverse sample of Ukrainian tech companies. For this paper, we conducted 16 semi-structured interviews with leaders and managers at different levels from 14 business companies.

These interviews delve into the tactics and efforts implemented by these leaders during the crisis and leaders' perspectives on how social responsibility contributes to resilience. Interviews have been transcribed verbatim, translated into English, and analyzed using inductive coding (Gioia et al. 2013). Additionally, the process incorporates the latest scientific research on organizational resilience and social responsibility to enrich the findings.

Our empirical setting is the Ukrainian business sector from the Kharkiv area, which has been attacked from the beginning of the hostilities and heavily impacted. The main offices of the participating companies were, at the moment of interviews, located in Ukraine, while their employees were dispersed in different parts of the country and abroad.

Recruitment of the participants was highly challenging. Convenience sampling was used to reach out to the CEOs of three companies who agreed to participate in the study. Next, snowball sampling was applied, as we asked the research participants for help in identifying other potential participants from other companies and inviting them to participate in the study. Most companies represent the IT sector (11) apart from three (3) companies, which work with delivering household goods, clothes manufacturing, and printed materials. Companies were interviewed in different phases of active hostilities. 10 companies were interviewed in September 2022 – February 2022, 4 were interviewed in June-July 2023, and 2 companies from the first batch (from September 2022 – February 2022) were reinterviewed in June-July 2023. All companies are middle and small, with more than five years of experience in the market. The interviews were conducted in Ukrainian or Russian. The interviews were transcribed verbatim and translated into English using NVIVO or Atlas.ti software (Friese 2019); our first step was to run inductive coding following (Gioia et al. 2013). The next step was to conduct selective coding. As we assume, discontinuities experienced and the adaptation strategies that the companies used to address them were specific leadership challenges to address in the organizational systems in crisis as the war.

Theory

The research will be guided by the theory of organizational discontinuity in remote work (Watson-Manheim et al., 2012), the idea of organizational adaptation (Sarta et al., 2020), and the leadership dynamics of complex adaptive systems and contemporary grand challenges (Uhl-Bien, 2021). We focused on discontinuities and leadership tactics that the companies used to address them in the crisis. The study aims to contribute a deeper understanding of leadership dynamics during a contemporary grand challenge such as war. As a new type of crisis of modern war raises leadership challenges, leaders invent new reactions and solutions to pass these critical circumstances inside the companies and the external world running its

activities in the complex adaptive systems.

Preliminary results

Leadership was a crucial effort in enterprise survival during crises, mainly focusing on the approaches used by managers to stabilize the situation. Communication and decision-making emerged as key activities during hostilities, while the advantages and challenges of remote and offline work were accepted. For digital-first enterprises, remote work became the only solution for organizational transformation. The study also highlighted exciting and unusual leadership perspectives: the new meaning of work, social responsibility, and corporate volunteering. These practices were intertwined and influenced by changes in organizations' activities during crises, redefining their missions and focus. The implementation of social activities within companies fostered excellent psychological stability, motivation to work, and a more substantial commitment to both social resilience and economic sustainability. While criticism of the separation of social responsibility and corporate volunteering exists, the article proposes this distinction as a logical result of rethinking organizational functions during societal crises as a complex adaptive system. In conclusion, new leadership practices emerge during critical periods, with potential implications for organizations even in more stable times.

Conclusions

As the war is ongoing, it is complicated to discuss resilience in the long run. Accessing the effectiveness of government policies for supporting organizations during a crisis is another area to look at in future research. Further, all our participants are CEOs, owners, or managers; the employees' perspectives should be voiced. Further, going deeper into the leader's perspectives and combining the interviews with public data analysis to get the organizational views might be practical.

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